

This attachment addresses the responsibility of the Children's Division (CD) for referring families to the Child Welfare Housing Assistance (CWAH) Program.

1. **Purpose/Objective:** Provisions in section 207.150, RSMo. allow the Division to provide housing assistance to families if inadequate or lack of housing is a primary barrier for safely keeping the child in the home or reuniting the child with his/her family. Housing assistance may be provided to:

- A. Families of children who are in imminent danger of removal and placement, when inadequate housing or homelessness is a primary barrier to keeping the child safely in the home; and
- B. Families of children who are in the legal custody of the Division, and the homelessness or inadequate housing of the parents is a primary barrier to safely reuniting the child with his/her family.

Housing assistance funds are to be used only when all other primary housing resources, such as Section 8, have been exhausted or are unavailable. Housing assistance should be used, when appropriate, rather than DFS crisis intervention funds, IIS or Family Reunion crisis funds. Housing assistance may be provided for one (1) to six (6) months, according to a family housing plan that is based on a month-to-month assessment of the needs of the family and their plan to maintain adequate housing independent of the assistance. Assistance shall not exceed reasonable rental costs for the community.

2. **Definitions:** For purposes of the CWAH program:

- A. "Imminent danger of removal" is defined as a danger of personal harm to a child which could reasonably be expected to result in out-of-home placement if not corrected.
- B. "Housing assistance" is to be provided by plan and is defined as rent subsidies, rent in arrears, and/or deposits sufficient to obtain/maintain adequate rental housing. Mortgage payments are not included in this definition as the law clearly limits assistance to rent.
- C. "Other housing related assistance" as related to this law is defined as assisting the family with utilities. Assistance with utilities should be provided only as it directly relates to the imminent danger of placement, or reunification, as defined earlier, and only to establish or maintain adequate rental housing.
- D. "Family housing plan" is supplemental to the family plan as identified in the (CPS-1) Child Abuse/Neglect Investigation/Family Assessment Summary, (CS-16) Family Assessment Packet or the (CS-1), case plan . It is designed to identify information specific to the family's housing needs and to help the family plan for autonomy by maintaining safe and affordable housing.

3. **Eligibility:** The use of the CWAH program is limited to families having an open CD child welfare case (this includes IIS families served by either contracted or in-house staff). It may be accessed at any point in the system as long as eligibility criteria are met. In order to determine a family eligible for CWAH, Children's Service Workers should assess the family according to the following criteria:

- A. The child(ren) has been placed in the custody of the Division pursuant to court order with the primary barrier to reunification being housing. A permanency planning review, or other review team process, including consultation with the juvenile officer, has determined that the family is ready for reunification and recommends the child(ren) return to the home;
- B. The child(ren) is in imminent danger of removal and placement, primarily because housing conditions threaten the safety and well-being of the child(ren) and the Children's Service Worker and his/her supervisor believe housing assistance will allow the family to remain together safely.

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| <p>NOTE: Housing assistance for families for whom housing issues arise following reunification should be assessed according to this criteria.</p> |
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- C. The family has demonstrated that other sources of housing assistance have been explored and exhausted. Other sources include, but are not limited to, Section 8, public housing, family and community resources;
- D. The family has participated with the Children's Service Worker in the development of a housing plan which addresses their present needs and their plan to maintain safe, adequate housing once housing assistance is not available; and
- E. It has been at least 12 months since the last time the family received assistance through this program.

4. **Eligible Services:**

A. Rental payments:

- 1) Rent may be paid from one (1) to six (6) months depending on the family housing plan. Generally, plans for payment will be made on a month by month basis. However, in the case of reunification plans, it may be beneficial to commit to assisting a family for three (3) months at the initial implementation of the plan. Under any circumstances, housing assistance is only available for a maximum of six (6) months.

There is not a ceiling on the amount of rent which may be paid per month. Rather, the Children's Services Worker and the family should determine if the rent requested is reasonable for the community and if the family will

be in a position to pay that amount of rent at the termination of the housing assistance.

- 2) Rent arrears may be paid as part of the housing plan. However, each month of arrears payment will be considered as one (1) of the eligible months of assistance. For example, if payment is made for two (2) months of rent arrears, the family would be eligible for another four (4) months of rent assistance.
- B. Housing deposits. Deposits may be necessary in order to assure stable housing for the family. Damage deposits may be made as part of the housing plan, but should not exceed an amount equal to one (1) month's rent. If it is necessary to pay the last month's rent to establish a new residence, this may be done and it will be considered one (1) of the six (6) months of assistance.
- C. Utilities. Utilities may be paid under the following circumstances:
- 1) A child(ren) is in imminent danger of removal or the primary reason the child cannot be returned to the home is because the lack of utilities presents high risk of personal harm, i.e. lack of heat in winter. Utilities may be paid only in situations where the rental home is adequate to meet needs for shelter if the utilities are connected; or
 - 2) New housing is being located for the family and they are unable to establish utilities through their own or other community resources.
- NOTE: In either situation, payments may include arrears and/or deposits in order to establish utilities in the parent's name.
- 3) The total amount spent for current utilities, arrears and/or deposits should not exceed \$1200.
 - 4) Utility payments for homeowners may not be paid through CWHHA.
- D. Rent and utilities may both be paid as long as the maximums allowed above are not exceeded for each type of payment.
- E. All provisions pertain to procuring adequate rental housing. Assistance to homeowners is available only if they have lost the property in foreclosure and must relocate to rental housing, and meet requirements as listed above. This refers to anyone with a written purchase agreement for the property, including lease with option to buy.
- F. Children in families living in shelters may not be considered in imminent risk of placement unless their allotted time in the shelter has expired and immediate danger of placement exists. For reunification purposes, CWHHA may be used if it is documented that the primary reason the children have not

returned home is due to the parents residing in a shelter, and other requirements as listed are met.

5. Staff Responsibilities:

A. Children's Service Workers

- 1) Assessment of need. When consideration is being made to recommend that a child be removed from his/her family, the Children's Service Worker, with supervisory consultation, should determine if the child could be kept at home or returned safely with the use of the CWHHA program. The Children's Service Worker should evaluate the family's ability to move beyond the housing crisis to self-sufficiency and determine what services might be necessary to assist in meeting this goal. If this appears likely, the family should be assessed according to the criteria listed earlier.

If there are additional areas of concern which place the child(ren) in imminent danger of removal, and the Children's Service Worker, with supervisory consultation, believes the family cannot be kept together safely with the use of housing assistance, the Children's Services Worker should consider the possibility of a referral to IIS. If such a referral is made, the IIS staff may access housing assistance. Arrangements for doing so will be discussed later in this document.

2) Development of Family Housing Plan.

- a. The Children's Services Worker should complete the CWHHA Form (CS-80) with the family. It will address the immediate housing needs and steps the family might take in moving toward a stable, independent housing arrangement. Please see the Children's Services Forms Manual for instructions for the CS-80.
- b. The CS-80 should be completed and attached to a copy of the current CPS-1, CS-16 or CS-1. These documents will constitute the family housing plan.
- c. The Children's Service Worker and the family should meet at least once per month to reevaluate the plan. At this meeting, changes in economic status should be considered. Decisions should be made regarding adjustments in the use of housing assistance funds, based on the family's movement toward self-sufficiency. It would be feasible that housing assistance funds might be reduced a small degree each month if the initial plan called for assistance over a period of several months.

It is very important that the planning for discharge from the housing program begins with the initial formulation of the plan and that the family understands that these are time-limited services. Failure to maintain safe and stable housing may result in the children being placed, or reentering out-of-home care.

- 3) Submission of family housing plan to housing specialist. The Children's Service Worker shall submit the family's housing plan to the county housing specialist for final approval and payment.
- 4) Negotiation with landlords and utility companies. The Children's Service Worker should assist the family in arranging for housing and utilities. Because payment will be made through the CS-65 process, staff will need to provide assurances that payment will be received within a few weeks. Each county office may want to devise a form letter to give to the vendor verifying the terms of the payment agreement and when payment might be expected.
- 5) Notification of payments to Family Support Division (FSD). The Children's Service Worker should contact FSD staff through the IM-16 (Communication Transmittal), if the family receives any type of public assistance. The use of housing assistance may impact on the family's eligibility for food stamps and/or temporary assistance. The possibility of this impact should be explained to the family.

B. Intensive In-Home Services (IIS) Staff

- 1) When assessing of the family, the Children's Services Worker should consider a referral to IIS if housing is one of several reasons the child is considered in imminent danger of removal. If a referral to IIS is appropriate, the IIS specialist will be responsible to work with the family to develop the initial family housing plan, negotiate with landlords and utility companies, etc.
- 2) The family housing plan must be approved through the site coordinator or his/her designee in the home county of the family, prior to going to the county housing specialist.
- 3) At the end of the IIS intervention, special care should be taken to be sure the housing plan for the family is clearly considered in the follow-up plan with the Children's Services Worker.